



NOAA Teacher at Sea
James Miller
Onboard NOAA Ship RAINIER
August 13 - 27, 2005

Log 5

Day 7: Friday, August 19, 2005

Location: Relocating to Cushing Bay northwest side of Mitrofinia Island

Weather: Sunny, low 70's, lots of smoke from area fires

Wind: variable

Seas: 1-2 foot swell

Itinerary: Working around Mitrofinia Island

Science and Technology Log

I am assigned to launch RA-5 today, which will be working what are called holiday lines. These are small areas that didn't get adequate coverage the first time they were scanned. Most of the lines were situated very close to shore near the peninsula and a bunch around Mitrofinia Island. Being assigned to holidays is very labor intensive for the coxswain (boathandler) because he/she is constantly turning the boat and working very close to shore. Often we had to put somebody (usually me) on the bow to watch we didn't plow into any rocks. The geology in the area is strange in that it could be 300 feet one second and then 3 inches the next, so running onto rocks is always a concern especially when working close to shore.

The entire crew is working extremely hard to finish up this area on this leg of the trip. The RAINIER is scheduled to be in Prince William Sound on the next leg and will continue surveying until mid-October. Between November and March the ship is in its homeport of Seattle, WA, getting repairs and preparing for the next season.

There are a few crewmembers onboard who are college students either working for the summer or taking time off to make some money. Then there are some crewmembers, such as the Chief Steward, that have been on the RAINIER for over 30 years.

The surveyors rotate between collecting data at sea and processing the data at NOAA Headquarters. They are required to be at sea for several months out of the year. Most of them have a four-year college degree and majored in geology or Graphical Information Systems (GIS), but there are a couple of assistant surveyors with associate degrees.

The officers are onboard for two years before moving on to their next assignment. They rotate between two years at sea and three years on land. It's clearly a difficult lifestyle for those who want a family. They all have four-year college degrees and usually majored in some sort of engineering, math, or one of the sciences. After signing

on to the NOAA Corps, they are sent to Kings Point Merchant Marine Academy for 3 months of intensive training before getting their first assignment.

Personal Log

Since we worked so close to shore, my day on RA-5 was great for getting some pictures of wildlife. There are puffins, and loons everywhere. When the launch approaches they try to fly but can't seem to get their fat little bodies airborne, so they skid across the water for about thirty feet and then dive. Along the shore of the peninsula there were a lot of fresh bear tracks. The grizzly bears in this area are among the largest in the world due to their high protein diet of salmon. Unfortunately, we didn't get to see any. Several Sei whales breached near the boat, which was really cool. It happened very quickly, but I think I was able to get some pictures. We also saw lots of bald eagles. They nest high up on the bluffs and when they get hungry they swoop down and grab a puffin or small gull. The highlight of the day was the seals. There's a large rock structure on the south side of the Island that a family of seals inhabit. The survey we were doing required us to get right up next to the island. There were at least two dozen seals some of which were huge—over 1000 pounds! When we approached they stood up and barked at us. Got some great pictures!

When we returned to the ship I decided to do some fishing off the fantail for halibut. Yesterday someone caught a 50-pounder in Fish Range Bay. After about 45 minutes of bouncing this glow-in-the-dark squid on the bottom, wham. It felt like I was snagged. It only turned out to be about a 20-pound halibut, but it fought like mad. My arms were killing me from reeling it up from 200 feet of water. These fish get over 300 pounds--I can't imagine! I just finished cleaning the fish and writing some logs, it's midnight. Assigned to RA-3 tomorrow for deep-water surveying. I've got to prepare myself for some rough seas and a long day.